

EMPERORS AS GODS, ANGELS AS BUREAUCRATS: THE REPRESENTATION OF IMPERIAL POWER IN LATE ANTIQUITY*

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RESUMEN

Este artículo versa sobre cómo la adopción del cristianismo por parte del estado romano a principios del siglo IV d.C. afectó a la percepción y representación del poder imperial. Su principal foco de atención es la relación –a menudo objeto de arduas disputas– entre las imágenes del gobierno en los ámbitos terrestre y celestial. Para los partidarios de Constantino y sus sucesores cristianos, la nueva religión del estado (hábilmente desplegada) ofrecía la posibilidad de presentar una imagen de la monarquía en la que el exclusivismo y el elaborado ceremonial cortesano –tradicionalmente considerados indicios seguros de despotismo– podían percibirse como expresiones positivas de un poder legítimo. El cristianismo contribuyó a dar una forma nueva a las viejas ideologías del poder, en un estado más centralizado e intencionadamente más ceremonioso. Debe resaltarse, al mismo tiempo, que las imágenes de este mundo y el venidero eran intercambiables. La nueva ideología cristianizada del poder dio mayor sentido tanto a la proyección de los emperadores y su majestad imperial como a los espléndidos relatos sobre la omnipotencia divina plenos de dramatismo. En la Antigüedad Tardía, el cielo seguía siendo un lugar muy romano: los ángeles parecerían altos cargos cortesanos, Cristo llevaría la púrpura imperial y el Juicio Final sería imaginado como un terrorífico apocalipsis administrativo, caracterizado tanto por la complejidad de sus disposiciones judiciales como por la exactitud burocrática de unos castigos cuidadosamente graduados.

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the ways in which the adoption of Christianity by the Roman state at the beginning of the fourth century A. D. affected the perception and presentation of imperial power. Its focus is the –often difficult and much disputed– relationship between images of government in the earthly and heavenly realms. For supporters of Constantine and his Christian successors, the new state religion (skilfully deployed) offered a means of presenting a version of monarchy in which exclusion and elaborate courtly ceremonial –traditionally interpreted as sure signs of despotism– could be seen

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as positive expressions of legitimate rule. Christianity helped give long-standing ideologies of power new form in a more centralised and self-consciously ceremonial state. Importantly too, images of this world and the new were closely reciprocal. A new Christianized ideology of power lent heightened meaning both to images of emperors and their imperial majesty and to the equally dramatically splendid accounts of divine omnipotence. In late Antiquity, heaven remained a very Roman place. Here angels might appear as high-ranking court officials, Christ might wear imperial purple, and the Last Judgement might be envisioned as a terrifying administrative apocalypse marked both by the complexity of its judicial arrangements and by the bureaucratic exactitude of its carefully graded punishments.

§I DREAMING OF HEAVEN

In the mid fourth century, the holy Egyptian monk Theodore had a vision.

While he was praying an ecstasy came over him, and this is what he saw... All the brothers were lying down like resting sheep, and an angel was in their midst watching over them... in his hand he held a very bright and fiery sword; he was dressed in a tunic... large medallions adorned this very shiny and very fine tunic; and his belt was a palm's breadth in width, it was bright crimson and sent out innumerable rays.¹

I cannot vouchsafe that this is an accurate description of an angel, (there are always limits to any historical enquiry) but it is a remarkably good description of a high-ranking later Roman bureaucrat. In the fourth century, even a relatively junior official was easily recognisable by his heavy, military-style cloak (*chlamys*), by his belt of office (*cingulum*) with its finely wrought and often highly decorated clasp, and by the brightly-coloured patches (*segmenta*) sewn or embroidered on his tunic.² A mid to late fourth-century tomb-painting from Durostorum (modern Silistra in Bulgaria) shows a provincial bureaucrat with attendant slaves carrying shoes, a white tunic, a cloak decorated with *segmenta*, and an impressively decorated *cingulum*.³ The

¹ *Bohairic Life of St. Pachomius* 84 (ed. L. T. Lefort, *CSCO* 89 (Copt. 7), Paris, 1925, reprinted Louvain, 1953; trans. A. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia I: The Life of St. Pachomius and his Disciples*. Cistercian Studies Series 45, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1980, 110-11).

² *C. Th.* 6.26.18, 6.27.17 (= *CJ* 12.20.2), 8.1.11. See too, P. Franchi de' Cavalieri, 'Come andavano vestiti ed armati i "milites" dell' "adparitio", *Note agiografiche* 7, *Studi e Testi* 49, Rome (1928) 203-38, at 211-29; R. MacMullen, 'Some Pictures in Ammianus Marcellinus', *ABull* 46 (1964) 435-55, esp. 445-52 (reprinted in his, *Changes in the Roman Empire: Essays in the Ordinary*. Princeton, 1990, ch. 9); A. Chastagnol, *La Préfecture urbaine à Rome sous le Bas-Empire*. Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences humaines d'Alger 34, Paris, 1960, 221-22; R. Delbrueck, *Die Consulardiptychen und verwandte Denkmäler*. Studien zur spätantiken Kunstgeschichte 2, Berlin, 1929, 36-40. Some splendid belt buckles and other fittings formed part of a hoard found at Ténès on the coast of Algeria, J. Heurgon, *Le Trésor de Ténès*. Paris, 1958, 31-36.

³ D. P. Dimitrov, 'Le pitture murali del sepolcro romano di Silistra', *Arte Antica e Moderna* 9 (1960) 351-65; *id.*, 'Le système décoratif et la date des peintures murales du tombeau antique de Silistra', *CArch* 12 (1962) 35-52.

style of these uniforms also reflected the continued use of military dress within the late Roman civilian administration. All officials were technically soldiers; their service was known as *militia*; they received rations (*annonae*) and a fodder allowance (*capitum*).⁴ Officials serving in the department under the praetorian prefect of the East (the most powerful civilian official in the empire) were enrolled in the fictive *legio I adiutrix*.⁵ Even in the sixth century, the most senior official in the department (*princeps officii*) – who had no doubt never seen any real military service in his life – still, as part of his official *insignia*, carried a centurion's swagger stick.⁶ The praetorian prefect himself was even more splendidly uniformed. On grand ceremonial occasions he wore a flame-coloured knee-length cloak striped with gold, a deep-purple tunic, an elaborately embellished crimson *cingulum*, and was girt with a sword.⁷

At court, other high-ranking imperial officials – to judge by the surviving representations – were also elaborately attired. At the very end of the third century, a small imperial audience hall was constructed within the fabric of the pharaonic temple of Ammon in Luxor in Egypt. The southern wall was dominated by a raised platform with a baldacchino (*ciborium*) over the emperor's throne. The limestone blocks with their beautifully carved hieroglyphs were plastered over and brilliantly painted to represent a glittering late Roman court scene. Although most of this fresco has now been obliterated (by Egyptologists keen to uncover the hieroglyphs beneath), it is still possible to catch a faded glimpse of the groups on the walls flanking the imperial throne. Here officials formed part of a procession which on the other walls also included soldiers and civilians. All here wear fine white tunics emblazoned with multi-coloured medallions, their broad hems finely-embroidered. Their shoes are embossed and stamped with intricate designs. Around their waists they sport richly-jewelled belts with finely-wrought clasps. One official holds a staff of office, another gestures deferentially, several have their hands and forearms veiled.⁸

⁴ R. MacMullen, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire*. Yale, 1963, 49-50; K. L. Noethlichs, *Beamtentum und Dienstvergehen: zur Staatsverwaltung in der Spätantike*. Wiesbaden, 1981, 20-34; C. M. Kelly, 'Emperors, government and bureaucracy', in Averil Cameron and P. D. A. Garnsey, eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History vol. XIII: The Late Empire, A. D. 337-425*. Cambridge, 1998, 138-83, at 168-69.

⁵ *CJ* 12.36.6, 12.52.3.2; E. Stein, *Untersuchungen über das Officium der Prätorianerpräfektur seit Diokletian*. Vienna, 1922, reprinted ed. J. R. Palanque, Amsterdam, 1967, 15-16.

⁶ Joh. Lydus, *Mag.* 2.9, 2.19 (ed. A. C. Bandy, *Ioannes Lydus: On Powers or The Magistracies of the Roman State*. The American Philosophical Society Memoirs 149, Philadelphia, 1983).

⁷ *Id.* 2.13.

⁸ J. Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity*. Cambridge 1995, 173-76; I. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, 'The Imperial Chamber at Luxor', *DOP* 29 (1975) 227-51, esp. 233-38; U. Monneret de Villard, 'The Temple of the Imperial Cult at Luxor', *Archaeologia* 95 (1953) 85-105, esp. 85-94; J. G. Deckers, 'Die Wandmalerei des tetrarchischen Lagerheiligtums in Luxor', *RQK* 68

Even damaged, these figures offer a memorable image of courtly magnificence – of high-ranking officials who in the sheer brilliance of their appearance could easily be confused with the angel of Theodore's night-time vision.

Nor should Theodore's dream be considered an eccentric or isolated experience. For holy men, visions of the divine which compressed the outward and visible forms of both sacred and secular power were an accepted part of their religious experience. The holiest might even appear to their followers, or their enemies, clothed – like Roman emperors – in royal purple.⁹ Heaven too, remained a very Roman place. A late fourth-century hexameter poem – preserved on papyrus fragments from Upper Egypt – related the vision of Dorotheus, a Christian mystic who 'sitting alone in the palace in the middle of the day'¹⁰ dreamt that he was transported to a heavenly palace, which in architecture and personnel was closely modelled on its earthly, imperial counterpart. In the audience hall, escorted by heaven's palace guard, he saw God surrounded by his courtiers. The archangel Gabriel stood next to a figure described in strict bureaucratic terminology as the 'Lord's *primicerius* (πριμικῆρος ἄνακτος)' – head of the *corps* of senior administrators (*notarii*) who staffed the imperial palace.¹¹ After a series of brutal punishments – both for his failure to obey orders and for his attempts to deny (even before Christ) his dereliction of duty – Dorotheus himself was finally confirmed in his post in God's heavenly palace guard:

I did not have simple clothing... but I was wearing a cloak made for me from two different sorts of linen. I stood with a kerchief around my neck and round my legs I wore long breeches and a multi-coloured belt.¹²

(1973) 1-34, esp. 8-17, 25-28, whose suggestion that the procession converged on the imperial throne I follow here. Some of the frescoes were sketched by the Egyptologist J. G. Wilkinson who visited the site around the middle of the nineteenth century. They are now in the Griffith Institute in Oxford.

⁹ *Bohairic Life of St. Pachomius* 144 (trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia I*, 204-205); *Theod. Hist. Rel.* 1.12 (James of Nisibis) (eds. P. Canivet and A. Leroy-Molinghen, *SChr* 234, Paris, 1977).

¹⁰ *P. Bodm.* 29, line 4 (eds. A. Hurst, O. Reverdin and J. Rudhardt, *Papyrus Bodmer XXIX: Vision de Dorotheos*. Fondation Martin Bodmer, Geneva, 1984). For a re-edited text (followed here) see, A. H. M. Kessels and P. W. van der Horst, 'The Vision of Dorotheus (*Pap. Bodmer* 29) edited with Introduction, Translation and Notes,' *VChr* 41 (1987) 313-59; for the date, J. Bremmer, 'An Imperial Palace Guard in Heaven: The Date of the Vision of Dorotheus,' *ZPE* 75 (1988) 82-88.

¹¹ *P. Bodm.* 29, line 49; Bremmer, 'An Imperial Palace Guard', 85. On the position and function of *notarii*, see, most conveniently, H. C. Teitler, *Notarii and Exceptores: An Inquiry into Role and Significance of Shorthand Writers in the Imperial and Ecclesiastical Bureaucracy of the Roman Empire (from the Early Principate to c. 450 A. D.)*. Dutch Monographs on Ancient History and Archaeology 1, Amsterdam, 1985, esp. ch. 6; A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey*. 3 vols, Oxford, 1964, vol. 2, 572-75.

¹² *P. Bodm.* 29, lines 329-34.

A similar concern with courtly protocol was central to a sermon in praise of the archangel Michael delivered in 535/36 by Theodosius, briefly bishop of Alexandria in Egypt. In attempting to describe something of the hierarchy of heaven and Michael's place at its head, Theodosius was drawn continually to images of an emperor and his court officials. Michael was God's 'Commander-in-Chief' and 'the governor of the denizens of heaven, and also the beings of the earth'.¹³ As a mark of his rank he wore a belt 'set with precious stone of great price' and 'a glorious mantle, of the measure of the majesty of which no man can describe'.¹⁴ In a splendid ceremony, God crowned Michael, marking him out as an archangel.

And he set upon the crown three seals in the form of the Holy Trinity, and the similitude of His image was upon the seals, so that the Archangel Michael might continue to invoke God at all times on behalf of His image.¹⁵

Such symbolism was significant. The ivory document cases (*codicilli*) handed in person by the emperor to senior administrative officials on their appointment were carved on their outer face with a portrait bust of the emperor. Displayed between burning tapers on a blue cloth-covered table (along with a large ceremonial silver ink-stand (*theca*), also decorated with images of the emperor) *codicilli* proclaimed the legitimacy of an official's acts. They also made public his subordination to a higher power on which both his authority and the continued security of his position depended.¹⁶

Importantly too, at least in Theodosius' version of Michael, those seeking the archangel's help could be certain that his position on the right hand of God was permanently assured. Unlike the imperial court, heaven was politically stable – at least after the expulsion of Satan and the rebel angels. The new order was fixed and unchanging.¹⁷ There was no risk that Michael might suddenly be replaced by another more favoured angel.

¹³ Theodosius, *On St. Michael the Archangel* 29 (ed. E. A. Wallis Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*. London, 1915, 321-431; trans. *id.*, 893-947, at 908); see too, T. Orlandi, 'Teodosio di Alessandria nella letteratura copta', *GIF* n. s. 2 (1971) 175-85, esp. 178-80, 182-83; more generally, on the (arch)angelology in Coptic texts, see, C. D. G. Müller, *Die Engellehre der koptischen Kirche: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der christlichen Frömmigkeit in Ägypten*. Wiesbaden, 1959, 8-35 and 161-218 on Michael; Theodosius' sermon is n°. 74 in his register of texts (at 162-63).

¹⁴ Theodosius, *On St. Michael the Archangel* 9 (trans. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Texts*, 898).

¹⁵ *Id.* 30 (trans. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Texts*, 908).

¹⁶ Delbrueck, *Die Consulardiptychen*, 3-8; Kelly, 'Emperors, government and bureaucracy', 152. The descriptions of these *insignia* and the details of their display are known largely from the medieval illustrations to a late fourth/early fifth-century list of administrative and military offices, the *Notitia Dignitatum*, see P.C. Berger, *The Insignia of the Notitia Dignitatum*. New York, 1981, 25-34, 175-90; R. Grigg, 'Portrait-Bearing Codicils in the Illustrations of the *Notitia Dignitatum*', *JRS* 69 (1979) 105-24, esp. 112-18.

¹⁷ Theodosius, *On St. Michael the Archangel* 20-30 (trans. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Texts*, 903-908).

He is not an earthly Commander-in-Chief who will come to an end, and whom the king can dismiss whensoever he pleaseth, but he is the Commander-in-Chief of the hosts of heaven, and he shall endure, with the King thereof, for ever.¹⁸

On this basis, Theodosius encouraged his congregation to pray to Michael and to celebrate his festival day. Here was a heavenly official who could be trusted to intercede with his superior. In a neatly constructed passage, Theodosius imagined an objector to his sermon who might argue that neither praise nor prayers should be offered to Michael, but to God alone.

And I on my part will make an answer unto thee, saying, Thou speakest well; a faithful man indeed is he whose faith is right towards his Lord. But hearken and I will tell thee. Let us take the case of a king who has taken possession of a certain country, and who hath a vast number of soldiers with him; wilt thou not find among all these hosts one man who is superior to all the rest, even though the king is over them all? And if it happen that the king hath an affection for some individual among these royal troops he will bestow upon him honours and possessions.... And he hath power to approach the king at all times, and he is able to deliver him from every evil thing, and from every danger, and he is such a valuable member of his body-guard that other folk find favour through him. And thus it is with every man who giveth alms and oblations unto God on the day of Michael; for the archangel taketh the sacrifices and gifts from his hands, and presenteth them unto God as a sweet-smelling savour, and he receiveth commands from God concerning these men.¹⁹

In these splendid images and stories of the world beyond, its dazzling inhabitants, and its complex administrative structures, what fascinates me is why the sacred should so closely parallel the secular. Why should angels appear uniformed as imperial administrators or body-guards? Why should heaven be seemingly so closely modelled on the imperial court? It is perhaps a particularly striking thing to find in the vision of a holy man, or in the biography of a dreaming monk. Such subversive and separatist tracts rarely find room to approve of the state, far less to raise its servants to heaven. Obviously, any good explanation of the origins and growth of this new Christianising language of power in the two centuries following the conversion of Constantine in 312 is likely to be both complex and multi-stranded. For present purposes, I should like to tease out three inter-connected lines of enquiry.

First, to suggest that the appearance of angels as bureaucrats should be seen both in the context of the vast ceremoniousness of late Antique society, and in the context of the perceptible rise from the beginning of the fourth century of a more formal and more stylised representation of power.

¹⁸ *Id.* 7 (trans. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Texts*, 897).

¹⁹ *Id.* 45-46 (trans. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Texts*, 918).

Secondly, to suggest that these new Christianising images of emperors and officials were deliberately designed to displace other, long-standing ways of talking about and judging the exercise of imperial power.

And thirdly, to suggest that angels could never have appeared as bureaucrats without the active support of the Christian Church. I tread carefully here. It has sometimes been argued that in return for massive state subsidies, tax exemption, and political support, the Christian Church was prepared to exalt Roman emperors and their courts to heaven.²⁰ But, for all its many attractions, I shall not (at least in this paper) pursue such a crassly materialistic line. My point here is markedly less polemic. It is simply to observe that many in the late-antique Church –both educated bishops and ordinary Christians– in their attempts to conceive of, talk about, and fight over, the nature of the divine were ineluctably drawn towards the images of power and magnificence forcefully fostered by the Roman state. From that point of view, it is perhaps unsurprising that visions of omnipotence in the next world should be shaped by the dominant images of power in this world.

§II ENVISIONING EMPERORS

The steady rise in the formality and complexity of ceremonial has long been recognised as one of the defining features of imperial power in late Antiquity. It has often be linked (as it was by contemporaries in the fourth century) to the increased centralisation of power at court in Constantinople and to the growth of a sophisticated and efficient bureaucracy. For me, this is an attractive connection.²¹ It seems no accident that in many of the great set-piece court ceremonials –such as the procession depicted on the walls of the imperial audience hall at Luxor– the emperor appears surrounded by serried ranks of carefully ordered officials. That bureaucrats should actively promote (or even enjoy) such occasions should not be surprising. Later Roman ceremonials imposed a glittering order on the world. They stressed formality, hierarchy, position, correct form, proper procedure. They created a structure in which everyone knew their place. In short, these ceremonies, established, reinforced, and celebrated a vision of rule

²⁰ The argument is an old one, see, for example, Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. vol. 2 (London, 1781), ch. 20, 189-92 (ed. D. Womersley, 3 vols, London, 1994, vol. 1, 732-35).

²¹ I canvass this point more fully in, 'Emperors, government and bureaucracy', 139-56. Important discussions of the relationship between ceremony and imperial power in late Antiquity include, S. G. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*. The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 1, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1981; J. F. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*. London, 1989, ch. 11; M. McCormick, 'Analyzing Imperial Ceremonies', *JCEByz* 35 (1985) 1-20; MacMullen, 'Some Pictures in Ammianus Marcellinus'.

whose institutional virtues were recognisably bureaucratic. More importantly, in these ceremonies, bureaucrats were clearly seen to be associated with the emperor. And that mattered, particularly in an imperially-centred world where the powerful were often known colloquially simply as *proximi* – ‘those who are nearest’.²²

In the late 560s, Flavius Corippus, once a small-town teacher in Africa, now an imperial bureaucrat in Constantinople, wrote a poem celebrating the accession of the emperor Justin II to the throne.²³ Corippus had an eye for imperial ceremony. One scene which particularly captured his imagination was the reception of an embassy sent by the Avars to demand the continued payment of subsidies in return for peace. (This tribe had first appeared on the Danube frontier in the late 550s and had been successfully bought off by Justinian.) Something of the awe inspired by the splendid state occasion on which the Avar ambassadors were received was vividly captured in Corippus’ panegyric: Ushered into the imperial audience hall, these barbarians suddenly found themselves entering another world.

The wide floor was wondrous with paving and carpets spread over it, and seats arranged in long rows adorned the splendid hall with their coverings. Hangings covered the doors.... When the officials had filled the decorated palace with their groups arranged in order, a glorious light shone from the inner chamber and filled all the meeting place. The emperor came forth...²⁴.

Even more magnificent was the sight of all those administrators flanking the imperial throne in an epitome of an ordered universe:

The imperial palace with its officials is like the firmament... Just as the golden shining stars in the curving sky accomplish their courses poised on their own measure, number, and weight, and remain firm in fixed retreat, and one light shines over all; all the stars yield to its superior flames and they feed on the fire of their monarch, by which they remain eclipsed.²⁵

²² Amm. Marc. 14.11.1, 15.8.2, 30.4.1.

²³ Averil Cameron, *Flavius Cresconius Corippus: In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris libri IV*. London, 1976, 1-2; J. R. Martindale, ed., *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire III: A. D. 527-641*. Cambridge, 2 vols, 1992, vol. 1, 354-55; R. A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in late Antiquity*. The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 11, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1988, 261-63, n°. 37. The objections to B. Baldwin, ‘The Career of Corippus’, *CQ* n. s. 28 (1978) 372-76 – suggesting that Corippus was a travelling poet and neither a grammarian nor a bureaucrat – are well set out in, Averil Cameron, ‘The Career of Corippus Again’, *CQ* n. s. 30 (1980) 534-39 (reptd. in her, *Continuity and Change in Sixth-Century Byzantium*. Variorum Reprints n°. 143, London, 1981, n°. 8) and S. Antès, *Corippe (Flavius Cresconius Corippus): Éloge de l'empereur Justin II*. Paris, 1981, xi-xvi, 90-91. On the scenes from Corippus discussed below, see particularly, Averil Cameron, ‘Corippus’ Poem on Justin II: A Terminus of Antique Art?’, *ASNP* (ser. 3) 5 (1975) 129-65, esp. 137-40 (reptd. in her, *Continuity and Change*, n°. 6). Translations of Corippus are adapted from Cameron, *Flavius Cresconius Corippus*.

²⁴ Corippus, *Laud. Iust.* 3.204-13.

²⁵ *Id.* 3.179-87.

The Avar response to this splendid imperial *tableau* was equally overdramatic.

Tergazis the Avar looked up at the head of the emperor shining with the holy diadem, he lay down three times in adoration and remained fixed to the ground. The other Avars followed him in similar fear and fell on their faces, and brushed the carpets with their foreheads, and filled the spacious halls with their long hair and the imperial palace with their huge limbs.²⁶

For Corippus, the Avars were model viewers of imperial ceremonial. Gazing in wild surmise, in the face of all this splendour they were struck by the unbridgeable gulf which separated barbarity from civilization. Confronted by the magnificence of an emperor and his brilliant court in all its glory the Avars knew themselves to be inferior.

The elaborate ceremony of the later Roman court epitomised the impersonal, institutional pattern of rule which characterises much of late Antiquity. Despite for us the often unpalatable degree of propagandistic exaggeration which these inflated descriptions of emperors and their courts seem to involve, such rococo representations of power should be taken seriously. An empire is held together not only by military force and efficient administration, it also requires an effective ideology to proclaim the rightness and authority of its government. Such a system can be as important (and as coercive for both rulers and the ruled) as more tangible expressions of power. The vast ceremoniousness of late-antique society was a key element in helping to establish and –through its unforgettable *tableaux*– to communicate, the legitimacy of an emperor and his régime. Pomp and power were inextricably linked. The deliberate and carefully exaggerated images of majesty not only elevated an emperor above the ordinary, they justified that distance by associating imperial rule with cosmic archetypes. Importantly too, ceremonial occasions permitted participants to glimpse something of a larger, transcendent order and to understand their place within it. Through elaborate rites, the ‘permanent quasi-liturgical drama’²⁷ which dominated so much of late Roman public life enacted an exemplary model of society whose focus was the emperor.²⁸

But for some observers, the court with its splendid ceremonies was not a potent symbol of imperial authority, but, rather, an admonitory exemplar of the ills of a new more centralised system of rule. In 398, the bishop Synesius of Cyrene, who had travelled from North Africa to Constantinople in an attempt to secure tax concessions for his province, found himself coldly rebuffed at the imperial court. He failed even to see the emperor Arcadius. In a stinging pamphlet –probably circulated privately in an attempt to secure the attention and support of a

²⁶ *Id.* 3.257–63.

²⁷ MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 8.

²⁸ Kelly, ‘Emperors, Government and Bureaucracy’, 145.

powerful (and eventually successful) coterie in Constantinople opposed to Arcadius' senior advisors and their policies— Synesius accused the emperor of haughtiness, luxurious self-indulgence and inaccessibility.

This majesty of yours, and the fear of being brought down to the level of mortals by becoming a familiar sight, causes you to be completely hidden away... rejoicing only in the pleasures of the flesh, and the most sensual of these, even as many as touch and taste provide; and so you live the life of a sea-borne jelly-fish.²⁹

Similarly, in the historian and polemicist Procopius' acerbic critique of the imperial court in the mid sixth century under Justinian and Theodora, the ritual surrounding the imperial couple was portrayed as a series of gross servilities and insufferable indignities.

Those who were supposed to be the emperor's confidants, stood at court unstintingly the whole day, and regularly for the greater part of the night without sleep or food at the usual hours.³⁰

This was a travesty of the proper relationship between monarch and advisers. In Procopius' critical vision, court ceremonial became a ludicrous charade of pointless pomp and circumstance; a paper-thin façade behind which unmentionable crimes could be committed.

Criticisms such as these drew much of their force from a long-standing and widely-accepted catalogue of imperial virtues (moderation, clemency, frugality, accessibility, willingness to uphold the law) and vices (cruelty, capriciousness, unpredictability, inaccessibility) whose long tradition reached back to semi-philosophical treatises on kingship written in the third and second centuries B. C..³¹ Reflecting the long-standing practice of Graeco-Roman eulogistic oratory, a late third- or early fourth-century handbook on rhetoric ascribed to Menander instructed the prospective author of an address on kingship (ὁ βασιλικὸς λόγος) to present an emperor's achievements as illustrations of his virtue.

²⁹ Syn. *de Regno* 14 (ed. A. Garzya, *Opere di Sinesio di Cirene: Epistole, Oprete, Inni*. Classici Greci, Turin, 1989). Alan Cameron and J. Long, *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius*. The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 19, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1993, esp. 91-142 (followed here) provide a detailed review and discussion of the long-running debate concerning Synesius' embassy, its date, and the meaning and purpose of his works written in Constantinople. See too, F. Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Background*. Dumbarton Oaks Studies 9, 2 vols, Washington D. C. 1966, vol. 2, 699-705; J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom*. Oxford, 1990, 104-45, 253-72.

³⁰ Proc. *HA* 30.31; see generally, Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*. The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 10, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1985, esp. 56-66, 242-48.

³¹ One of the best overviews of Roman imperial virtues under the Principate remains, A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Emperor and his Virtues', *Historia* 30 (1981) 298-323; see too, J. R. Fears, 'The Cult of Virtues and Roman Imperial Ideology', *ANRW* 2.17.2 (1981) 827-948, at 880-924, esp. 918-24.

On every occasion, divide the actions of those whom you are going to praise into the virtues (there are four virtues: courage, justice, moderation and wisdom) and see to what virtues the actions belong and whether some actions, in war or peace, are associated with one virtue –for example, with wisdom.³²

Equally influential (and heading the *Panegyrici Latini* –a late fourth-century collection of twelve speeches given before emperors), was the expanded version of a long address to the emperor Trajan delivered nearly three hundred years earlier by Pliny the Younger.³³ In that speech, Pliny was concerned to demonstrate the extent to which an ideal ruler conformed to a pattern of behaviour and morality sanctioned by the upper-classes. Imperial virtues –clemency, friendship, frugality and accessibility– were presented as evidence of an emperor's preparedness to uphold and participate in the existing moral and social order. These were proofs of his *ciuilitas*, a word which evoked, 'the behaviour of a ruler who is still a citizen in a society of citizens'.³⁴ Pliny's version of imperial power linked monarch and subject closely together; the actions of both could be judged on the same scale of values. A good king was also a good citizen, on that claim rested his authority:

The emperor is one of us –and his superiority is greater and more conspicuous because he thinks of himself as one of us, and bears in mind that he is a man just as much as a ruler over men.³⁵

By contrast, a 'bad' emperor remained hidden and inaccessible, skulking 'behind walls and masonry', screened by 'a thousand doors beyond which there are always more obstacles barring the way'.³⁶

Of course, it goes without saying that these moral templates represent ideals (of extreme goodness and badness) which no real emperor could ever actually achieve. Rather, these fantasies were part of a complex ideology of rule which attempted to regulate the exercise of imperial power through a particular economy of praise and blame. Yet,

³² Menander Rh. 373 (eds. D. A. Russel and N. G. Wilson, Oxford, 1981). For Menander's influence on fourth-century panegyrics, see, for example, H. Gutzwiller, *Die Neujahrsrede des Konsuls Claudius Mamertinus vor dem Kaiser Julian*. Basler Beiträge zur Geschichtswissenschaft 10, Basel, 1942, 92-99; S. G. MacCormack, 'Latin Prose Panegyrics', in T. A. Dorey, ed., *Empire and Aftermath: Silver Latin II*. Greek and Latin Studies, Classical Literature and its Influence, London, 1975, 143-205, at 144-46; J. A. Straub, *Vom Herrscherideal in der Spätantike*. Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Geistesgeschichte 18, Stuttgart, 1939, reprinted 1964, 153-59. Specific borrowings from classical authors are traced for *Pan. Lat.* 2-9 in A. Klotz, 'Studien zu den *Panegyrici Latini*', *RhM* 66 (1911) 513-72, at 531-65.

³³ See now the perceptive study by S. Bartsh, *Actors in the Audience: Theatricality and Doublespeak from Nero to Hadrian*. Harvard, 1994, ch. 5. A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Civilis Princeps: between Citizen and King', *JRS* 72 (1982) 32-48, remains fundamental to understanding the moralising structure of Pliny's speech.

³⁴ Wallace-Hadrill, 'Civilis Princeps', 42.

³⁵ Plin. *Paneg.* 2.4.

³⁶ *Id.* 49.1, 47.5.

even in the later Empire – in an imperial world far-removed from that envisioned by Pliny the Younger nearly three centuries earlier – these same moral categories continued to offer a grid on which contemporaries could plot their critiques of individual emperors. In two orations delivered in 369 and 370, an upper-class spokesman, Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, stressed the importance of the Roman Senate in the government of the Empire, by eulogising the emperor Valentinian in terms strongly reminiscent of Pliny on Trajan.³⁷ In the early 360s, Julian was similarly praised by those who approved of his attempts to present himself as a philosopher-king on the model of the second-century emperor Marcus Aurelius. In a series of speeches, the famous Antiochene orator Libanius offered a virtuoso exposition of traditional virtues with appropriate classical parallels. Reaching a splendid climax in his *Funeral Oration on Julian* (probably never publicly delivered) Libanius declaimed:

He was more self-controlled than Hippolytus, as just as Rhodamanthys, more intelligent than Themistocles, braver than Brasidas. He restored to health a world which had sickened. He hated wickedness, was kind to the just, hostile to the self-indulgent and a friend to all fair-minded men.³⁸

Similar extravagant praise of Julian's moderation, justice, courage and foresight formed the unifying themes of a speech given before the Senate of Constantinople by the consul Claudius Mamertinus on New Year's Day, 362:

Nor has he any need to acquire paintings, marble inlays, panelled ceilings decorated with solid gold, he who, for the greater part of the year slept on the bare ground, sheltered only by the sky.³⁹

³⁷ Symm. *Or.* 1.23, 2.30 (ed. O. Seeck, *MGH (AA)* 6, Berlin, 1883); see too, MacCormack, 'Latin Prose Panegyrics', 174-77; F. del Chicca, *Q. Aurelii Symmachi V. C.: Laudatio in Valentinianum Seniore Augustum Prior: Introduzione, commento e traduzione*. Università degli studi di Cagliari, Istituto di filologia latina, Rome, 1984.

³⁸ Lib. *Or.* 18.281; see too, J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch: City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire*. Oxford, 1972, 24-26; P. Petit, 'Recherches sur la publication et la diffusion des discours de Libanius', *Historia* 5 (1956) 479-509, at 486-88.

³⁹ *Pan. Lat.* 11.11.4 (ed. E. Galletier, Paris, 3 vols, 1949-55); compare, Plin. *Paneg.* 13. The eleven late-antique *Pan. Lat.* are newly translated in C. E. V. Nixon and B. S. Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini, Introduction, Translation and Historical Commentary*. The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 21, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1994. On Mamertinus' speech, see esp., R. C. Blockley, 'The Panegyric of Claudius Mamertinus on the Emperor Julian', *AJPh* 93 (1972) 437-50; Gutzwiller, *Die Neujahrsrede*, esp. 100-102. The use of traditional categories of virtue and vice in the *Pan. Lat.* is perceptively discussed in F. Burdeau, 'L'empereur d'après les *Panegyriques Latins*', in F. Burdeau, N. Charbonnel and M. Humbert, eds., *Aspects de l'empire romain*. Travaux et recherches de la Faculté de Droit et des Sciences Économiques de Paris, série "Sciences historiques" 1, Paris, 1964, 1-60, esp. at 25-29, 34-55; M.-C. L'Huillier, *L'Empire des mots: orateurs gaulois et empereurs romains, 3^e et 4^e siècles*. Centre de recherches d'histoire ancienne 114, Annales littéraires de l'Université de Besançon 464, Paris, 1992, esp. 325-60; R. Seager, 'Some Imperial Virtues in the Latin Prose Panegyrics: The demands of propaganda and the dynamics of literary composition', in F. Cairns, ed., *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar 4 (1983)*, Liverpool, 1984, 129-65, at 155-63.

The greater prominence of such rhetoric under Julian no doubt reflects something of that emperor's own –often idiosyncratic– views on the nature and presentation of imperial power.⁴⁰ Even so, for fourth-century emperors, some conformity to the ideal of a citizen-king was an important demonstration of their fitness to rule. In Rome, following a splendid *aduentus*, Constantius II addressed the Senate and the people, and then went on an extensive, touristic walk-about through the city.⁴¹ Similarly, also in Rome, even the emperor Theodosius I –perhaps more accustomed to the rhythmic chanting of the crowd in the hippodrome at Constantinople– was said to have found time to exchange jokes with passers-by.⁴²

This emphasis on the continuing importance of long-standing ways of coming to terms with imperial power should, in its turn, be matched by an equal stress on the ability of fourth-century orators to place these well-worn classical gems in startlingly new settings. In 389, the Gallic orator Latinus Pacatus Drepanius delivered a panegyric before the emperor Theodosius I in Rome. The use of familiar categories for the cataloguing of stock-standard imperial virtues, placed Pacatus' oration firmly within a long-established rhetorical tradition.⁴³ The similarities with Pliny's speech in praise of Trajan are striking. So are the contrasts. In Pacatus' version, imperial virtues were not presented as proofs of an emperor's willingness to conform to an aristocratic ideal of a citizen-king. Rather, they were divine qualities patterned on the heavens above. An emperor's virtues were further evidence of that vast distance which lay between citizen and king. Theodosius' concern for his friends did not reveal any desire for civic equality. Rather –in Pacatus' elegant re-working of a well-worn motif– the emperor 'summoned Friendship not only to the palace, but clothed her in purple, wreathed her in gold and gems and placed her on the throne'.⁴⁴ Similarly, in his frugality, Theodosius did not seek to match any existing aristocratic ideal; rather, he set a model for others to follow.⁴⁵ Most telling is Pacatus' treatment of the emperor's accessibi-

⁴⁰ P. Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism*. Oxford, 1981 (reptd. as P. Athanassiadi, *Julian: An Intellectual Biography*. London, 1992), ch. 5, esp. 174-81; Dvornik, *Political Philosophy*, vol. 2, 659-72; *id.*, 'The Emperor Julian's 'Reactionary' Ideas on Kingship', in K. Weitzmann, ed., *Late Classical and Mediaeval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend, Jr.* Princeton, 1955, 71-81.

⁴¹ Amm. 16.10.13-17. The city of Rome was, unsurprisingly, a favoured site for displays of *ciuititas*: Pan. Lat. 12.47.3; Claudian, *de VI cos. Hon.* 543-59, 587-94; with discussions in Alan Cameron, *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius*. Oxford, 1970, 382-89; Straub, *Herrscherideal*, 187-98.

⁴² Claudian, *de VI cos. Hon.* 60.

⁴³ See the important discussion by A. Lippold, 'Herrscherideal und Traditionsverbundenheit im *Panegyricus* des Pacatus', *Historia* 17 (1968) 228-50.

⁴⁴ Pan. Lat. 12.16.2; compare, Plin. *Paneg.* 85; on these passages in Pacatus, see too, R. Rees, 'The Private Lives of Public Figures in Latin Prose Panegyric', in Mary Whitby, ed., *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity*. Mnemosyne Supplement 183, Leiden, 1998, 77-101, at 97-99; L'Huilier, *L'Empire des mots*, 343-45, 390-99; Seager, 'Some Imperial Virtues', 159-60.

⁴⁵ *Id.* 12.14.4.

lity. Theodosius –on the model of Trajan– did not remain ‘shut away in a remote part of the palace’, nor in his public appearances did he permit himself to be ‘completely surrounded above and on all sides by a very dense screen of men and weapons’.⁴⁶ For Pliny, an emperor’s visibility was a crucial demonstration of his *ciuilitas*. Trajan by making himself available to his people had bridged the gap between citizen and king. But –for Pacatus– Theodosius’ accessibility, like his displays of frugality and friendship, was yet another demonstration of the irreducibility of that distance. A virtuous emperor’s willingness to be seen merely offered greater opportunity for awestruck crowds to gaze upon his divine countenance.⁴⁷

Pacatus’ speech before Theodosius I in 389 represents one possible perception of imperial power. Like any first-rate orator, Pacatus arranged his carefully selected material into a pattern suitable for a specific occasion. That particularity is important. To plunder the sources in order to assemble an amalgam of qualities attributable to a late antique ‘ideal prince’ is to risk losing something of the delicate negotiation which any individual representation of imperial power inevitably involved.⁴⁸ In the later Empire, a range of perspectives, laudatory and critical, were still available –even to court poets and orators. The fourth century, in particular, was marked by an unresolved tension between traditional moralising views of imperial power, which stressed the close relationship between citizen and king, and other more ceremonial versions which emphasised the distance between subject and ruler. Such tensions were hardly new. In a series of much-admired paradoxes, Pliny the Younger had himself sought elegantly to reconcile his ideal vision of a citizen-king with the emperor Trajan’s evidently superior position.

Surely nothing could be more citizen-like (*ciuilis*) or more senatorial than that title of *Optimus* bestowed by us?

For you are raised to the heavens by the very ground on which we all tread and where the footprints of a *princeps* are mingled with our own.

For when a man can advance no further than the highest rank, the only way he can go even higher, is by stepping down.⁴⁹

Yet in the later Empire (even more so than the Principate) such tactics –for all their undoubted rhetorical brilliance and attractive intellectual acuity– must have risked seeming even less convincing. At least from the beginning of the fourth century, the growth of bureaucracy and the concentration of power in a court difficult of access and

⁴⁶ *Id.* 12.21.3-4.

⁴⁷ *Id.* 12.21.2 and 5.

⁴⁸ MacCormack, ‘Latin Prose Panegyrics’, 159-66; *id.*, *Art and Ceremony*, 12-14.

⁴⁹ Plin. *Paneg.* 2.7, 24.5, 71.4. On these paradoxes, see particularly, Bartsch, *Actors in the Audience*, 161-65; S. M. Braund, ‘Praise and Protreptic in early Imperial Panegyric: Cicero, Seneca, Pliny’, in Whitby, *The Propaganda of Power*, 53-76, at 58-68; E. Aubrion, ‘Pline le Jeune et la rhétorique de l’affirmation’, *Latomus* 34 (1975) 90-130, at 120-22.

characterised by impersonal, distancing ceremony widened still further the always perilous gap between the exercise of autocratic power and those justifications of monarchy which stressed the accessibility of the emperor in his position as a responsible and worthy member of the Roman élite. (Perhaps too, the attempts by the emperor Julian in the early 360s to mark himself off from his allegedly more autocratic predecessors by self-consciously parading his claims to *ciuilitas*, made any subsequent imperial deployment of this imagery even more difficult.) From this perspective, Pacatus' panegyric on Theodosius can perhaps most profitably be understood as an attempt to bridge that ever-widening gap; a bold attempt, in the midst of an ancient imperial city, to assert a late-antique emperor's close affinities with the canonically virtuous rulers of a far-distant Principate. For Pacatus (and perhaps for his audience and his emperor), the establishment of such legitimating continuities was an important element in the justification of Theodosius' right to rule. In Rome, the Principate and the achievements of its emperors could not easily be dismissed. Rather, in the skilful hands of sophisticated, classically-educated *érudits* like Pacatus, a potentially problematic past was radically transformed to reflect more closely the pressing concerns of a markedly different present.

But for those in a new Christian empire less concerned with preserving –even radically transformed– the concerns and priorities of the classical past, a vision of imperial splendour whose sacred, other-worldly claims were justified by Christianising images offered a powerful alternative to what to some (perhaps even in Pacatus' audience in Rome) must have seemed dangerously irrelevant and increasingly out-moded ways of representing and justifying imperial power. In a series of orations, the renowned rhetorician Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, exploited to the full 'an aggressively Christian'⁵⁰ view of the relationship between the imperial and the divine. In a speech delivered in 335, to celebrate the dedication of the church built on the site of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, Eusebius described God the Father: 'For He Himself dwells like an emperor somewhere within inconceivable, innermost and most inaccessible regions (ἐν ἀρρήτοις καὶ ἀδύτοις καὶ ἀβάτοις), in light unapproachable'.⁵¹ The image was even more elaborate in an oration given the following year to mark the thirtieth anniversary of Constantine's accession: 'Him celestial armies encircle... an infinite number of angels... gaze upon His dazzling presence'.⁵² All this splendour takes place in seclusion: 'the universe which lies between has been drawn across, its darkness separating

⁵⁰ T. D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*. Harvard, 1981, 254.

⁵¹ Eus. *Laud. Const.* 12.2 (ed. I. Heikel, *GCS* 7, Leipzig, 1902). On this speech, see, H. A. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius' Tricennial Orations*. U. of California Classical Studies 15, 1975, esp. 30-45; T. D. Barnes, 'Two Speeches by Eusebius', *GRBS* 18 (1977) 341-45.

⁵² Eus. *Laud. Const.* 1.2.

those outside from those within these royal halls'. Eusebius congratulated his courtly audience on being like that celestial band:

So let those who have entered within the sanctuary of this holy place –that innermost, most inaccessible of places (ἔἴσω ἀδύτων τε καὶ ἀβάτων μυχῶν)– having barred the gate to profane hearing, narrate the sovereign's most secret mysteries to those alone who are initiated in these things.⁵³

These are more than mere rhetorical games –although they are of course (like the panegyrics of Pliny the Younger or Pacatus) excellent rhetoric. In collapsing the distance between the sacred and the secular, Eusebius –explicitly drawing on Christian theology– developed a language which enabled him to legitimate through divine parallels an imperial image of exclusion, of inaccessibility, of impenetrable ceremony, of drawn curtains and veiled mysteries. This was a language which could be used to counter the image of an accessible 'good emperor' surrounded by equals; and of a 'bad emperor' who (in Pliny the Younger's version) remained unseen 'behind walls and masonry' screened by 'a thousand doors beyond which there are always more obstacles barring the way'. By contrast, in the new courtly vision of Eusebius, the ceremonial monarch, pavilioned in splendour, was presented as a positive and legitimate expression of power.

Images drawn from the new state religion helped sanctify a new system of rule. In the exegetical homilies of skilled ecclesiastical rhetoricians, parallels between this world and the next became elaborate and sophisticated conceits. For St. John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople at the turn of the fourth century, the city of God was like an imperial palace –adorned with innumerable courts and buildings.

Here angels stand, not before a mortal king, but before him who is immortal, the king of kings and lord of lords. They do not have a leather belt around their waists, but that glory which is unutterable.⁵⁴

Colourful language was matched by art. From the mid sixth century, visitors to Ravenna in northern Italy could see in the church of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo a series of mosaics on Gospel themes –each

⁵³ *Id.*, *Prologue 4*. From the large (and still growing) number of works on Constantine, Eusebius and fourth-century political theology, I have found the following particularly useful: Barnes, *The New Empire*, 245-55; Dvornik, *Political Philosophy*, vol. 2, 611-22; Straub, *Herrscherideal*, 113-29; R. Farina, *L'Impero et l'Imperatore cristiano in Eusebio di Cesarea: la prima teologica politica del Cristianesimo*. Biblioteca teologica Salesiana 1:2, Zurich, 1966, 166-235; K. M. Setton, *Christian Attitude towards the Emperor in the Fourth Century especially as shown in Addresses to the Emperor*. Studies in History, Economics and Public Law 482, Columbia UP, New York, 1941, reprinted 1967, 46-54.

⁵⁴ Joh. Chrys. *Hom. in Ep. I ad Thess.* 6.4 (PG 62: 434).

with Christ dressed in imperial purple.⁵⁵ Most striking of all, in the Cappella Arcivescovile those on their way to mass passed beneath a powerful representation of the victorious Christ in the flame-coloured knee-length cloak and the crimson *cingulum* of a Praetorian Prefect.⁵⁶ Flanking the sanctuary in San'Apollinare in Classe, stood his archangels Michael and Gabriel likewise wearing the regulation cloaks and multi-coloured tunics of high court officials – the visual incarnations of the bureaucratic angel of Theodore's vision.⁵⁷

These parallels were close and deliberate. In Constantine's Lateran Basilica in Rome, the clergy seated in the apse faced a gorgeous canopy-like structure of hammered silver supported on columns, with a vaulted ceiling of purest gold. Under the canopy, was a silver statue of Christ enthroned, surrounded by angels.⁵⁸ When in November 565, that Avar embassy came before Justin II, they too faced a scene of glittering majesty. To quote Corippus:

The imperial throne ennobles the innermost sanctum. It is set with four marvellous columns over which a canopy, shining as if of liquid gold, shades, like the vault of the curving sky, the immortal head and throne of the emperor as he sits there. The throne is adorned with jewels and proud with purple and gold.⁵⁹

In the light of such magnificence, the Avar reaction was perhaps unsurprising. Confronted by an emperor enthroned, surrounded by the serried ranks of his officials, men whose countenances shone like

⁵⁵ F. W. Deichmann, *Ravenna: Geschichte und Monumente*. Ravenna: Hauptstadt die spätantiken Abendlandes 1, Wiesbaden, 1969, 176-91; *id.*, *Ravenna: Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes II: Kommentar, 1. Teil*. Wiesbaden, 1974, 155-61, esp. 160. See too the excellent plates in, *id.*, *Frühchristliche Bauten und Mosaiken von Ravenna*. Ravenna: Hauptstadt die spätantiken Abendlandes 3, Wiesbaden, 1969, n^{os}. 113 (Christ with angels), 156 (The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes), 161 (Healing the Blind), 174 (Parable of the Sheep and Goats), 180 (The Last Supper), 184 (Gesthemene), 187 (Betrayal). On these and similar images, see the still fundamental study by A. Grabar, *L'Empereur dans l'art byzantin: recherches sur l'art officiel de l'empire orient*. Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Strasbourg 75, Paris, 1936, reprinted London, 1971, esp. 89-122, 196-243; and the perceptive approach of Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer*, 177-88. For a radically different vision (not shared here) of imperial imagery in early Christian art, see, T. F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*. Princeton, 1994, with the reviews by P. Brown in *ABull* 77 (1995) 499-502 and W. E. Kleinbauer in *Speculum* 70 (1995) 937-41.

⁵⁶ Deichmann, *Ravenna: Geschichte und Monumente*, 202-203; *id.*, *Ravenna... Kommentar, 1. Teil*, 203; *id.* *Frühchristliche Bauten*, n^{os}. 216-17; Grabar, *L'Empereur dans l'art byzantin*, 237-39.

⁵⁷ Deichmann, *Ravenna: Geschichte und Monumente*, 269; *id.*, *Ravenna: Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes II, Kommentar, 2. Teil*. Wiesbaden, 1976, 245, 262-64; *id.*, *Frühchristliche Bauten*, n^{os}. 383, 402 (Michael), 403 (Gabriel).

⁵⁸ *Lib. Pont.* 34.9-10 (ed. T. Mommsen *MGH (Gest. Pont. Rom.) I*, Berlin, 1898). The exact nature of this *fastigium* is unknown. It was either a gable or some kind of canopy, see, R. Krautheimer, S. Corbett and A. K. Frazer, *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae: The Early Christian Basilicas of Rome (IV-IX Cent.)*. Monumenti di antichità cristiana 2:2, 5 vols, Vatican City, 1937-77, vol. 5, 88; M. Teasdale Smith, 'The Lateran *Fastigium*: A Gift of Constantine the Great', *RAC* 46 (1970) 149-75.

⁵⁹ Corippus, *Laud. Iust.* 3.194-99.

the 'golden shining stars in the curving sky',⁶⁰ the Avars could perhaps be forgiven for believing *—aliud Romana palatia caelum—* that 'the Roman palace was indeed another heaven'.⁶¹ That confusion puts them in good company. In the original interpretations of that imperial audience hall built in the late third century within the fabric of the pharonic temple of Ammon at Luxor in Egypt, the splendidly dressed figures in the frescoes were seen not as courtiers or high-ranking officials, but as angels. Even in modern scholarly visions, the emperor's court became heaven; an imperial audience hall became a Christian church.⁶²

§III. ON THE INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS

Of course, these perspectives were not always easily accepted—especially by some Christians. In the early sixth century, Severus, bishop of Antioch, objected to the portrayal of the archangels Michael and Gabriel, 'as princes or kings, with a royal robe in purple'. Such representations he argued confused the proper spheres of Church and State. They devalued the mystery and true splendour of the former; they lent the latter too powerful a justification for its actions.⁶³ This was an old dispute. In 390, in Milan, St. Ambrose had forcibly reminded Theodosius I that: 'The purple can make emperors— not priests.'⁶⁴ But for the established Church—apart from such neatly turned rhetoric—in practice, the division was often difficult to maintain; it was (perhaps unsurprisingly) most dramatically enacted outside formal ecclesiastical hierarchies in the maverick actions of holy men and their (often carefully contrived) displays of otherworldliness. St. Sabas in his audience with the emperor Anastasius followed—rather than preceded—his retinue. As a result, he was locked out of the imperial throne room.⁶⁵ St. Theodore, once destined for a bureaucratic career, cast off his 'gold belt and expensive clothes' and wore instead a new uniform—a corslet, a hair shirt and an iron belt.⁶⁶ Lastly, the fourth-century Gallic saint, Martin of Tours. Martin once sought an audience of the emperor Valentinian. For six days the emperor refused. Luckily, on the seventh, Martin obtained the help of an angel and was miracu-

⁶⁰ *Id.* 3.182-82.

⁶¹ *Id.* 3.244.

⁶² Monneret de Villard, 'The Temple of the Imperial Cult', 95; Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, 'The imperial chamber', 227 n°. 1.

⁶³ Sev. Ant. *Hom.* 72.365-66 (ed. and trans. M. Brière, *PO* 12, Paris, 1919).

⁶⁴ Theod. *HE* 5.18.21 (eds. L. Parmentier and F. Scheidweiler, *GCS* 44, Berlin, 1954). On this famous incident, see now the important reconsideration in N. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital*. The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 22, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1994, 315-30.

⁶⁵ Cyr. Scyth. *V. Sab.* 51 (ed. E. Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*. Texte und Untersuchungen 49:2, Leipzig, 1939).

⁶⁶ *V. Theod. Scy.* 5 (ed. A. J. Festugière, *Vie de Théodore de Sykéôn I: Texte Grec*. Subsidia Hagiographica 48, Brussels, 1970).

lously transported into the imperial audience chamber, spectacularly by-passing the detailed mechanisms of exclusion which surrounded the court. (This angel –at least– was clearly no bureaucrat.) But Martin's problems did not end here. The emperor refused to rise to greet him. A ceremonial deadlock ensued as Valentinian remained firmly seated. It was only broken when Martin's ever-helpful guardian angel set fire to the imperial throne, precipitating the slightly-singed emperor into rising and recognising the holy man. The story is instructive. Even the power of the holy man was best manifested in his ability to control court ceremonial.⁶⁷

These flamboyant displays of holy contempt for secular power represented extremes. They sounded a warning of the enervating consequences of too comfortable a relationship between Church and State. They sought to deepen the divide between this world and the next. But for those concerned with gently coaxing the great mass of the faithful across that chasm, such ostentatious demonstrations of alienation and difference needed to be tempered with a recognition that, at least for many ordinary Christians, encouragement and strength were derived from an image of heaven as this fallen world perfected. In the fourth century, Ephraim the Syrian elegantly captured the problem faced by those who wished to talk of heaven:

For him who would tell of it
there is no other means
but to use the names
of things that are visible,
thus depicting for his hearers
a likeness of things that are hidden.⁶⁸

The didactic use of metaphors was widely advocated. John Chrysostom argued that: 'Human illustrations... while insufficient to describe the things spoken of, and unable to reveal even half of their true proportions, nevertheless suffice given the weakness of the hearers.'⁶⁹ In a long treatise *On the Incomprehensibility of God*, he went on patiently to explain archangels, and to deal with the difficult business of their wings:

Their wings reveal, as it were, the loftiness of their nature. Gabriel, for example, is shown flying, not because angels have wings, but so that you may know that he comes down to human beings from the loftiest of places and from a way of life above.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Sulp. Sev. *Dial.* 2.5.5-9 (ed. C. Halm, CSEL 1, Leipzig, 1866); Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, 269.

⁶⁸ Eph. Syr. *Hymni de paradiso* 11.5 (ed. E. Beck, CSCO 174 (Syr. 78), Louvain, 1957; trans. S. Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise*. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 1990, 155).

⁶⁹ Joh. Chrys. *Hom. de Capto Eutrop.* 9 (PG 52: 404).

⁷⁰ Joh. Chrys. *de Incomp.* 3 (PG 48: 724C); see, J. Daniélou, 'L'incompréhensibilité de Dieu d'après Saint Jean Chrysostome', *RecSR* 37 (1950) 176-94.

But whatever the theology, views of perfection in the next world inevitably depended on the visionary and his views of this world. The shining New Jerusalem of the apocalyptic revelation looked, in many ways, strikingly like the earthly city it was designed to replace. Perhaps in response to their own experiences of dealing with government (and with those who sought their aid in preference to an official tribunal) later Roman divines were captivated by visions of an afterlife characterised by its ceremonial order, its careful regimentation and its bureaucratic exactitude. In another fourth-century dream, St. Pachomius, the founder of communal monasticism in Egypt, and Theodore's spiritual father, saw something of that perfection.

At the death of a pious man, three angels whose rank corresponds to the measure of the dying man's conduct come to fetch him... The three angels are in ascending rank, and the one of lower rank always obeys the one whose rank is higher... God acts thus so that those angels who come to visit the man may lift him out of his body with proper patience, and lest some high-ranking angels, being sent to take someone who is of low rank by his practices, should treat him according to the custom of earthly authorities. These authorities act with partiality, impressed by riches and empty glory... but the divine powers act in all things in accordance with right judgement, in conformity with the Lord's command and with the merit of the works that have been accomplished.⁷¹

Similar administrative care was taken with the wicked. Pachomius' vision of Hell included pitiless 'torturing angels' with whips who rejoiced at the torments of the wicked and received each new batch of damned souls who, in their turn, were 'classified for punishments according to their deserts'.⁷² It was something of this bureaucratic order and punctiliousness (even in the punishment of transgressors) which Pachomius' successors attempted to mirror in his monasteries. In their structured communities, the monks of the desert were like angels, 'drawn up in perfect order, robed in white'.⁷³ New recruits were ordered into communities, prayer groups and work gangs. Their day was timetabled and centrally controlled.⁷⁴ This regimentation extended to the natural world, chaotic and disorderly after

⁷¹ *Bohairic Life of St. Pachomius* 82 (trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia I*, 105-106).

⁷² *Id.* 88 (trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia I*, 115).

⁷³ Ruf. *Hist. Mon. (G)* 8.19 (Apollo) (ed. A. J. Festugière, *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*. *Subsidia Hagiographica* 34, Brussels, 1961, reprinted *Subsidia Hagiographica* 53, 1971).

⁷⁴ See D.J. Chitty, *The Desert a City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire*. Oxford, 1966, 22-27; F. Ruppert, *Das pachomianische Mönchtum und die Anfänge klösterlichen Gehorsams*. *Münsterschwarzacher Studien* 20, Münsterschwarzach, 1971, 233-337; and esp. P. Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt*. *The Transformation of the Classical Heritage* 6, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1985, 77-104 emphasising that the monastic rule attributed to Pachomius was largely devised by his successors.

the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. In the monastery gardens of fourth-century Egypt, even the windfalls were to be arranged in neat, straight rows under the fruit trees.⁷⁵ It was Pachomius too, who appeared to his successor Theodore dressed in imperial purple.⁷⁶ Such symbolism – even for a monk who had rejected the world – was powerful. It was that Theodore (a man who appears to have been peculiarly susceptible to visions) who began this piece with the vision of a Roman official posing as an angel; or at least an angel dressed as a Roman official; or perhaps both at once.

That compression of images was also central to a series of terrifying sermons preached by John Chrysostom in the late 380s. In 387, the citizens of Antioch in Syria rioted pulling down the statues of the emperor Theodosius I, pelting them with filth and dragging them through the streets. John, then a priest in the city, graphically described the fear of Antiochenes in the days which followed as they expected, ‘the wrath of the emperor to come like fire from above’. Prominent Antiochenes fled to the desert. An ominous silence descended on the once busy public squares and porticoes.

For as a garden when the irrigation fails shows trees stripped of their foliage and bare of fruit, so now indeed is it with our city. For help from above having forsaken her she stands desolate, stripped of nearly all her inhabitants.⁷⁷

The worst fears of the people seemed to be confirmed with the arrival of an imperial commission to investigate the unrest. According to the orator Libanius, also an eyewitness, those suspected of involvement were arrested, condemned and punished – ‘some fell by the sword, some lost their lives burnt at the stake, some were destroyed thrown to the jaws of wild animals’.⁷⁸ As the imperial commissioners continued their grim deliberations, John Chrysostom delivered a (perhaps not altogether welcome) series of homilies which combined striking rhetorical images of a terrified populace with a strong apocalyptic theme. The fear in the city was a forewarning of the Last Judgement. The dread inspired by the imperial commission was a mere shadow of things to come:

I exclaimed, in those words of Solomon, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” [*Ecclesiastes* 1.2] For I saw both this and another saying fulfilled through these works, that which says: “All the glory of man is

⁷⁵ *Pachomii Praecepta* 77 (ed. A. Boon, *Pachomiana Latina*. Bibliothèque de la Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique 7, Louvain, 1932). P. Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*. Harvard, 1978, 96.

⁷⁶ *Bohairic Life of St. Pachomius* 144 (trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia* I, 204-205).

⁷⁷ *Joh. Chrys. Hom. ad Pop. Ant.* 2:1 (PG 49: 35); see, G. Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest*. Princeton, 1961, 426-33; J. N. D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom – ascetic, preacher, bishop*. London, 1995, 72-82; F. van de Paverd, *St John Chrysostom, The Homilies on the Statues: An Introduction*. *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 239, 1991, 15-159.

⁷⁸ *Lib. Or.* 19.37.

as the flower of the field. The grass withereth and fadeth away." [Isaiah 40.6-7] For then indeed wealth, and high birth, and distinction, and the patronage of friends, and family, and all this in this life were found worthless, the sin and the breach of the law which had been committed having dispelled all this help... And looking at these things, I cast in my mind that fearsome tribunal; and I said to myself: If now, when men are judges, neither mother, nor sister, nor father, nor anyone else (even though innocent of the acts committed) has the power to deliver the accused; who will stand by us when we are brought to trial at the dread tribunal of Christ? Who will dare speak out? Who will have the power to deliver those led away to unbearable punishments?⁷⁹

A similar grim concern with the judicial violence of the Last Judgement combined (like Pachomius) with a fascination for its bureaucratic exactitude, was also central to an apocalyptic work known as the *Vision of St Paul*. The composition of this work is difficult to date. The core seems likely to have been written in the late third century; but its final, revised form (or at least so the preface claims) dates to 420.⁸⁰ Certainly the circumstances of the text's discovery – again in its own version – were remarkable.

In the consulship of Theodosius II and Flavius Constantius (in 420), a certain high-ranking man (*honoratus*) was living at that time in Tarsus, in the house which had been that of St. Paul; an angel, appearing in the night, revealed it to him, saying that he should dig up the foundations of the house and should make known what he found. But he thought that these things were dreams. But the angel coming for the third time beat him and forced him to dig up the foundations. And digging he found a marble box, inscribed on the sides; there was the revelation of St. Paul, and his shoes in which he walked teaching the word of God. But he feared to open the box and brought it to the governor. When he had received it, the governor... sent it to the emperor Theodosius... When the emperor had recei-

⁷⁹ Joh. Chrys. *Hom. ad pop. Ant.* 13.2 (PG 49: 138).

⁸⁰ On the dating and composition of the text, which survives in a wide variety of languages and versions, see the judicious summary in M. Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature*. Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1983, 16-19. Arguments for a third-century date (with a later revision) are most recently canvassed in T. Silverstein and A. Hilhorst, *Apocalypse of Paul: A New Critical Edition of Three Long Latin Versions*. Geneva, 1997, 11-12; for opposing views, arguing for a second-century date (with a later revision) see, C. Carozzi, *Eschatologie et Au-delà: Recherches sur l'Apocalypse de Paul*. Publications de l'Université de Provence, Aix-en-Provence, 1994, esp. ch. 2; and for a late fourth- or early fifth-century date, P. Piovanelli, 'Les Origins de l'Apocalypse de Paul reconsidérées', *Apocrypha* 4 (1993) 25-64, esp. 45-54. In dating the revision of the text to 420, I have followed the emendation to the text suggested in T. Silverstein, 'The Date of the "Apocalypse of Paul"', *Mediaeval Studies* 24 (1962) 335-48, esp. 337-45; Silverstein and Hilhorst, *Apocalypse*, 18-19; for an opposing view, Piovanelli, 'Les Origins', 51-53. The best guide to descriptions of hell in apocalyptic literature remains Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*.

ved it he opened it and found the revelation of St. Paul. He sent a copy to Jerusalem, and retained the original himself.⁸¹

This was an appropriate foundation myth for such a text. Like Chrysostom's sermons in Antioch, St Paul's visions of the next world were greatly enriched in meaning –and made more presently terrifying– by their explicit imperial associations. It mattered to the author of the text (and to its intended readership) that an emperor could be imagined to be concerned with this account of the world to come and might himself keep the autograph manuscript –perhaps along with the St. Paul's shoes– in the imperial library in Constantinople.

Like John Chrysostom's vision, St. Paul's version of the apocalypse was also greatly concerned with the sheer magnificence of the administrative detail of the world to come. Sinners were carefully filed according to their wrongdoings. In a text which in many ways prefigures Dante's *Inferno*, Paul was taken on a guided tour by a guardian angel who explained in meticulous detail the principles of classification adopted in Hell.

And I saw there a river boiling with fire, and in it a multitude of men and women immersed up to the knees, and other men up to the navel, others even up to the lips, and others right up to their hair... And I asked the angel and said, "Who are these, sir, immersed up to their knees in fire?" He answered me and said, "These are they who when they have gone out of church busy themselves with talk of issues which should not concern them. Those who are immersed up to the navel are those who, when they have taken the body and blood of Christ, go and fornicate and do not cease from their sins until they day they die. Those who are immersed up to the lips are those who slander each other when they assemble in the church of God; those up to the eyebrows are those who nod to each other in their malice and plot against their neighbour."⁸²

Nor were carefully graded punishments meted out lightly. The heavenly tribunal adopted a carefully regulated procedure. Each soul appeared before the Lord God who commanded a recording angel to present in evidence to the court the (no doubt often bulky) files containing the detailed records of that soul's unrepented wrongdoings. Against a soul who stubbornly refused to admit of its sins, Paul witnessed a particularly thorough angel in full administrative action.

⁸¹ *Visio Pauli* 1-2 (in the so-called "Long Latin" version of the text from a ms. in Paris ed. Silverstein and Hilhorst, *Apocalypse*). There is a useful translation of an earlier edition of this version (by M. R. James) in J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Oxford, 1993, 616-44. The account of the finding of the text is placed at the end of the Syriac version (ed. G. Ricciotti, 'Apocalypsis Pauli syriace', *Orientalia* n. s. 2 (1933) 1-25, 120-49 at §52; trans. J. Perkins, 'The Revelation of the Blessed Apostle Paul translated from an Ancient Syriac Manuscript', *JAOS* 8 (1864) 183-212, at 209-210).

⁸² *Visio Pauli* 31 (for the parallel passage in the Syriac, §32, trans. Perkins, 'The Revelation', 203).

And the angel of the sinful soul came, having in his hands a document, and said, "These, Lord, in my hands, are all the sins of this soul from its youth right up until today, from the tenth year of its birth. And if you command, Lord, I will also relate its acts from the beginning of its fifteenth year."

But even eternity is too short for some bureaucratic *minutiae*. The Lord God speaking from the bench –like any perceptive and slightly sarcastic judge unwilling to slow down the judicial process just for sake of administrative detail– ordered the angel to get to the point:

And the Lord God, the just judge, said, "I say to you angel, I do not expect of you an account of this soul since it was fifteen years old, but set forth its sins for the five years before it died and before it came hither."⁸³

The emperor Theodosius (if he ever did read this text) would, I suspect, have greatly enjoyed God's reply to this over-zealous heavenly court official. The Lord God –like any wary emperor– was unprepared to have the exercise of his power limited by tedious and overly-painstaking bureaucratic action. Angels, like earthly court officials, had always to be watched. Even in heaven, the Lord God had to work hard to ensure that the Last Judgement did not become caught up in unnecessary red tape.⁸⁴

For many of those who heard or read these homilies, the similarities between the ultimate tribunal and even a provincial governor's court (not to mention the awesome majesty of an imperial audience hall) must have been striking. Doubly so. These parallels lent a present and comprehensible reality to a divine mystery. They also lent divine sanction to standard administrative procedures. The Last Judgement presented a detailed version of later Roman bureaucracy perfected. In the frightening visions of Chrysostom and Paul, the world would end in a chilling administrative apocalypse. But, at the same time (while recognising the impossibility of solving some of life's iniquities and inequalities) in these visions of the Last Judgement, the tension between these closely parallel versions of this world and the next also exposed the inadequacies and limitations of the mundane. The competition between Church and State over this same ideological ground should make us wary (for example) of assuming a single and univocal

⁸³ *Id.* 17; see too, the version of this passage in the Coptic text: 'And at that moment the angel came into the midst, with a bill of indictment of its sins in his hand, and he said, "My Lord, the sins which this soul hath committed since its youth are in my hand; dost Thou wish me, O my Lord, to recite its sins from the time when it was ten years old?". And the Judge said unto the angel of the soul, "O angel, I do not seek to know what sins it hath committed since the time when it was ten years of age or fifteen; on the contrary, I only ask thee concerning the sins which it hath committed in this year, the year in which it died."' (ed. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Texts*, 534-74; trans. *id.* 1043-84, at 1046-47).

⁸⁴ C. M. Kelly, 'Later Roman bureaucracy: going through the files', in A. K. Bowman and G. D. Woolf, eds., *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*. Cambridge, 1994, 161-76; Kelly, 'Emperors, Government and Bureaucracy', 169-75.

response to these apocalyptic visions, or to the procession of officials around the imperial audience hall in Luxor, or to Pacatus' presentation of Theodosius I, or to Corippus' version of court ceremonial. No doubt some viewers were impressed –perhaps even awe-struck– at the enormity of secular power and its claims to divine legitimacy. No doubt some saw too in such images the heavenly validation of earthly imperial splendour and inaccessibility. Others –perhaps with a finer sense of irony– might see in that comparison only an exaggeration of the antithesis between the two. It is after all, the differences which ultimately give *both* these images their power. Comparisons –as always– cut both ways.

Of course, as often in late Antiquity, it is difficult to know how to deal with what sometimes seems a confusing and kaleidoscopic series of competing views of power. What at least is seems safe to say is that the impact of a view of emperor and court constructed around Christian imagery and language introduced a new and important way of perceiving and conceiving of both imperial and divine power. A new Christianised ideology of power gave a heightened meaning both to images of imperial majesty in this world and to the dramatically splendid accounts of divine omnipotence. Both the sacred and the secular were compressed in a new world of doubled and double-edged images. Visions of emperors as Christ, imperial palaces as heaven, and angels as bureaucrats were never clear-cut. They were always open to conflicting interpretation. But then –as Theodore still dreaming of angelic figures in uniform– would perhaps cheerfully have admitted, that is, in large part, both the point and the power of any heavenly vision.

Many Christians in the later Empire would have agreed. Here again is John Chrysostom, brilliantly evoking the magnificence of a procession in an exegetical sermon on Paul's *Letter to the Romans*:

The men in golden apparel, and the pairs of white mules caparisoned with gold, and the chariots inlaid with precious stones, and the snow-white cushions... and dragons fashioned from silken cloth, and the shields with their golden bosses... and the horses with their golden trappings and gold bits. But when we see the emperor, we lose sight of these. For he alone draws our gaze: the purple robe, and the diadem, and the throne, and the clasp, and the shoes –all the brilliance of his appearance.⁸⁵

Another description of an imperial ceremony? Yes –in one sense. But one whose images are sanctified and justified by comparison with the divine world which lies just beyond it. A description which underlines that –at least from the point of view of emperors and bureaucrats– it was the possibility of that legitimating enjambment between heaven and earth which was one of the great successes of the conversion of Christianity to a state religion. But this is also description which exposes the limits, insecurities and unavoidable ambiguities that such an

⁸⁵ Joh. Chrys. *Hom. in Rom.* 14.10 (PG 60: 537).

assertion inevitably contained. For (if we are to believe John) the above is a description not of a splendid imperial ceremony; nor of a later Roman emperor and his retinue; but of something immeasurably more powerful – the Second Coming of Christ.